

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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July 10, 1980

PHYLLIS EDWARDS ORDAINED PRIEST,  
DECLARED DEACON IN 1964

UNION CITY, N.J. -- Declaring that the "Church tonight is more whole than it was yesterday," the Rt. Rev. John S. Spong, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark ordained to the priesthood one of the first women to be recognized as a deacon in the Church.

Although General Convention did not officially consider women to be deacons until 1970, the Rev. Phyllis Edwards was declared deacon, rather than deaconess, in 1964 by Bishop James Pike of California.

The next year she was working in the inner city of San Francisco when the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., requested clergy to join in a civil rights march in Selma, Ala. Sent as the "token" woman from the Diocese, according to Mrs. Edwards, she found herself in the front line of the march for the same reason. It was during her experience in Selma that she saw the relationship between the oppression of blacks and of women, an insight which affected her ensuing ministry.

For several years she continued on the Diocesan staff in California, then served as director of Christian education in a parish in Evanston, Ill. Her next position was hospital chaplain, followed by work in a campus ministry at Northern Illinois University in Dekalb. During this period of ferment over the place of women in the Church, Mrs. Edwards chose to let her "ministry of being affect the Church," rather than seeking early ordination.

A native of Chicago, she earned bachelor and master's degrees in Education from Black Hills Teachers College in Spearfish, S.D., while teaching elementary school and raising two sons and two daughters. A desire for greater involvement in the Church, which has always been an important part of her life, led her to enter Seabury Western Seminary after her husband's death. At present she is director of the summer camping program for the Diocese of Newark.

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